

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024**Candidate:** Angel Gutierrez**Question: In no more than a paragraph, introduce yourself and why you are running to serve on the Board of Education.**

Answer: I bring over 25 years of executive leadership experience in governance, financial management, fundraising, operations, policy, and program development, serving vulnerable communities in Chicago and Denver. I've led large-scale programs, managed multi-million dollar budgets, and served on various boards, including as chairman of the Rauner Family YMCA. My public service includes projects like the Grocery Task Force and the Denver Public Safety Task Force, where I've united diverse stakeholders to solve complex issues. I hadn't considered running for office until a 40% property tax increase made me question how our tax dollars are being spent. As a father, I'm concerned that we're paying more to fund an underperforming school district with declining enrollment, overpaid leadership, and lack of effective budgetary oversight. It's time to better serve our students.

Question: Have you interacted with the special education system in CPS in any capacity? If so, what was your experience?

Answer: I have not personally interacted with the special education system in CPS. But as I walk my district, conversations with parents have revealed the troubling reality that our school system often falls short in adequately serving our special education students and families, oftentimes failing to meet federal law requirements. At every step of the process, I've heard challenges with getting the right accommodations documented, the right services provided, and the right services provided consistently with care. This is a disservice to our community as ALL students deserve equitable support and access to the services they need to have a fulfilling and fitting education.

Question: Many families of students with disabilities talk about the challenges they face trying to navigate the special education system in CPS. Why do you think families are so frustrated?

Answer: Families are frustrated because CPS has consistently failed to provide the services that students with disabilities are entitled to by law. Instead of CPS being a partner to families, families often feel like it's an uphill battle to successfully navigate the special education system in CPS. This is also an area where inequities are much more prevalent. Families are already having to advocate for additional resources to better support their students; that coupled with the inequity of resources across the city can be very

disheartening. This process is not collaborative, transparent, or accessible, and families need that to do right by their students.

Question: At the beginning of this school year, over 1,500 students with disabilities legally entitled to transportation had not received a bus route. These routing delays, common since 2020, result in students missing valuable school hours and parents missing work opportunities.

What steps will you take as a board member to ensure that students are provided bus routes in a timely manner?

Answer: It would be a real shame if CPS failed our students with disabilities before our students even made it to school. This is why the Board needs to come together and draft a plan that addresses the immediate need and sets our students up for success in the long run.

I would begin by looking at what other districts are doing to meet their needs for accessible transportation for students with disabilities. Additionally, I would work to implement policy recommendations from CPS Parents for Buses. The Board also needs to make sure that CPS is investing and allocating the proper resources needed to provide accessible transportation. It's important for us to ensure that we draw down all allowable federal, state, and local dollars that are available for serving students with disabilities. Lastly, I would ensure that CPS partners with local nonprofits, government entities, for-profit businesses, and healthcare systems that serve students and offer similar transportation services for students with disabilities.

Question: Preparation for life after high school is important for all students, especially those with disabilities. Research shows that students with access to transition programs such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Dual Credit courses have greater graduation and employment outcomes than their peers. However, in CPS, disabled student enrollment in these programs lag well behind their nondisabled peers.

As a board member, what would you do to ensure equal access for students with disabilities to career training offerings?

Answer: To ensure equal access for students with disabilities to career training offerings, I would focus on removing barriers that prevent their access to, and enrollment in, Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Dual Credit programs. This includes assessing the specific barriers they face, increasing outreach to students and families, and collaborating with diverse special education teams to adapt curriculum and provide accommodations to

promote student success. I would also advocate for support services such as mentoring and tutoring, while partnering with businesses to offer internships and job shadowing for students with disabilities. Monitoring progress and outcomes along the way will be key to ensuring these programs are accessible and effective. We can commit to being responsive to the data and build in key metrics, assessment check-ins, and feedback forums to pivot when necessary and double down on what works.

Question: Over 65% of CPS schools are not fully ADA accessible. In practice, this means that “neighborhood schools” are not an option for many students with physical disabilities, let alone disabled teachers, disabled parents, disabled voters, or other disabled community members visiting our schools. The 2023 CPS Facilities Master Plan identifies building accessibility as an important priority, but the district has not adopted a roadmap or plan to achieve better building accessibility.

What steps should the district take to address a lack of accessibility in its buildings?

Answer: CPS must remedy the lack of accessibility in its buildings in order to become compliant with federal ADA laws. I plan to prioritize all ADA and immediate critical need capital projects, with an equity lens. In partnership with the Chicago City Council, I want to explore using TIF funds to help bring schools up to code, modernize our schools, and tackle the \$3 billion dollars in deferred maintenance. The same discussion would be had with the state legislators in Springfield and our congressional delegation in Washington about considering a special allocation of capital dollars specifically for CPS.

Question: CPS has a history of segregating students with disabilities. The Corey H. settlement in 1998 required the district to move toward meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities for students who could make meaningful progress in a less restrictive environment. In the last two years, the number of cluster classrooms in the district has increased by 200%, presumably because these students cannot be supported to make meaningful progress in the general education setting, even with supports. As a board member, what kinds of questions would you ask to understand this sharp increase in restrictive placements?

Answer: As a board member, it’s crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the increase in restrictive placements. Here are some key questions to consider:

-Data Analysis:

---What specific data do we have on the number of students placed in cluster classrooms versus general education settings over the last few years? How does this trend compare to previous years, and what factors might have contributed to this sharp increase?

-Reasoning Behind Placements:

---What are the primary reasons for students being placed in cluster classrooms instead of general education settings? How are individual student needs assessed when determining their placement?

-Support Systems:

---What support services are currently available in general education settings, and how have these changed over time? Are teachers and staff adequately trained to support students with disabilities in inclusive environments?

-Outcomes for Students:

---What outcomes are we seeing for students placed in cluster classrooms compared to those in general education settings? How do we measure meaningful progress for students with disabilities, and how are those metrics applied in placement decisions?

-Parental and Community Feedback:

---What feedback have we received from parents and guardians regarding their children's placements? How does the district engage with the community to understand their concerns and expectations for inclusive education?

-Policy and Practice Review:

---What policies and practices are currently in place to ensure compliance with the Corey H. settlement and promote inclusion? Are there any recent changes to policy that may have influenced this increase in restrictive placements?

-Resource Allocation:

---What resources (staffing, training, funding) are allocated to both cluster classrooms and general education settings? Are there specific barriers (financial, staffing, etc.) that prevent more effective inclusion practices?

-Future Plans:

---What steps is the district taking to address the increase in restrictive placements and promote more inclusive practices? How can we involve stakeholders (teachers, parents, advocacy groups) in developing strategies for improvement?

By asking these questions, you can gain a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to the education of students with disabilities in your district.

Question: What would be your top priority for improving access to education for students with disabilities in CPS?

Answer: My top priority for improving access to education for students with disabilities in CPS is to enhance inclusive practices across all schools. This includes providing professional development for staff on inclusive strategies, allocating resources like assistive technology and support staff, and fostering co-teaching between general and special education teachers. Strengthening IEPs to ensure individualized support, creating a school culture where these IEPs are taken very seriously, involving parents in decision-making, and establishing accountability measures to track progress are also essential. By focusing on these areas, we can create a more inclusive environment that supports all students with disabilities.